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SUBJECT: EXPANDING PUBLIC SERVICES TO SOUTH AFRICA'S RURAL
POOR

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Summary

11. In a continuing series of USG-funded dialogues between rural communities and local government representatives (reftel), SAG officials briefed poor rural women of Limpopo Province on their rights to SAG assistance and on the mechanisms for accessing public services. Officials listed an array of available monetary and food grants and noted the SAG was working to adjust them to discourage dependency on high numbers of children as a sole source of income. SAG offered loans to start up small business cooperatives, with project advisors to help communities of low literacy formulate plans. Speakers said public housing was expanding with help from the EU, although they acknowledged the waitlist was still over a decade long. End Summary.

Background: DHRF Grant to Hurisa

12. On October 3 poloff attended a second of nine USG-sponsored forums led by the Human Rights Institute of South Africa (Hurisa) to improve awareness among rural women of their socio-economic rights and entitlements to basic government services. The workshops are funded by a \$27,000 grant from DRL's annual Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF). The project began with a train-the-trainer workshop in Johannesburg to coach nine social workers from three of South Africa's poorest and most neglected provinces -- Northwest (reftel), Limpopo, and Eastern Cape. Participants will then lead workshops in their home areas for a minimum of 15 local community members.

Limpopo: Hardscrabble Subsistence

13. Limpopo Province, in South Africa's far northeast bordering Zimbabwe and Botswana, is one of the country's poorest regions of small rural villages and little infrastructure. Its Capricorn District is reminiscent of the American Southwest -- arid, rocky, and red-soiled, where cattle graze on sparse scrub brush amid spiky aloe and candelabra cactii. In many of these villages the population live off livestock and subsistence crops, with water supplied weekly by tanker trucks. Hurisa's workshop was held in the town of Haenertsberg, the center of a timber industry amid pine forests sewn two generations ago in low foothills fed by dammed streams. The lumber mill is the main local employer and also a prominent sponsor of many community programs.

Community Needs for SAG Help

14. The day began with a brainstorming session, inviting the community's suggestions of problems it wanted government officials to address. (Hurisa later explained offline that while participants in the Northwest Province were versed on their rights and ready to challenge the SAG on non-delivery, in Limpopo the awareness of SAG programs was so low that dialogue had to begin on far more basic terms.) As their main concerns the audience listed HIV/AIDS education, the impact of HIV/AIDS on children and orphan-led households, illiteracy and adult education, unemployment, alcohol abuse, livestock theft, access to electricity and water, and financial grants. Each SAG speaker then related his or her department's programs to this list of community priorities.

Grants -- and Dependency

15. The Department of Social Development (DSD)'s Charles Q5. The Department of Social Development (DSD)'s Charles Chuene outlined DSD programs. These included counseling by social workers for dispute resolution within families and villages, and by probation officers assigned to protect and supervise minors charged with crimes. DSD's main offer, however, was its menu of monetary grants, such as for child support, care of relatives, disability, and old age. Early child development (ECD) initiatives supplied nutritious meals through preschools, while a "relief of social distress" (RSD)

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grant delivered food parcels to struggling families. The latter RSD grants required referral by village chiefs. Acknowledging the prevalent pattern in Limpopo of couples having more children as a source of grant income, Chuene noted DSD had proposed an alternative 'minimum income grant' to avert dependency on child grants.

Incentives to Entrepreneurs

16. Yvonne Ledwaba of the Department of Economic Development, Environment, and Tourism (DEDET) explained the workings of SAG loans to encourage formation of small business cooperatives. Advisors were available to help develop proposals for funding. An annual entrepreneurship competition offered a prize of 200,000 Rand (\$25,000) to the winning business plan, such as for a bakery or beauty salon. A previous winner for a business building pit toilets was now expanding into the molding manufacture of component parts. In anticipation of the wave of FIFA World Cup tourism in 2010, Ledwaba urged her audience to study their grandmothers' skills in sewing and beadwork to make crafts for sale to foreign visitors. "That family education is free," she said, "And you can even charge tourists to watch you work!"

17. Hurisa's program officer Elvis Fokala challenged Ledwaba to adjust DEDET initiatives to Limpopo realities. While business plans might be fine for urban entrepreneurs, women in Limpopo had more basic worries like food security, obtaining seeds to grow vegetables, and access to water. Low literacy meant many could not even write a business plan. How, asked Fokala, could small villages mobilize to assert their urgent needs to the SAG? Ledwaba responded that SAG had in 2003 created a corps of provincial Community Development Workers (CDWs) assigned to visit villages, audit the needs of communities and households, and coordinate assistance across SAG departments. A CDW could help a village form a cooperative, enlist DEDET skills to draft a project plan, and tap into DSD for funding.

18. The Department of Local Government and Housing's representative spoke about public housing, commonly referred to as 'RDP' housing (after the Reconstruction and Development Plan). These were funded by the SAG and donated to municipalities, lately with greater oversight from onsite project coordinators to ensure proper fulfilment after some projects reported as complete were discovered to have never been built. An injection of European Union funding had boosted the housing program in Limpopo. One group of local women had formed a construction cooperative to build their own housing. The latest RDP model, formerly just two rooms, had expanded to two bedrooms, a dining area, and an indoor toilet. All new homes had electricity and running water, which were gradually being added on to older projects.

19. The subject of allocation of RDP housing generated lively interest. The waitlist for RDP homes dated back to 1994, and quirks in the system meant that later applicants sometimes received housing sooner. One participant alleged there were cases of municipal officials selling RDP houses for bribes. Such complaints were common, admitted the Housing rep, so SAG had created a confidential telephone hotline to report fraudsters. The audience grew animated at this news and fraudsters. The audience grew animated at this news and avidly noted the number. When Hurisa's Fokala asked for a show of hands of participants living in RDP houses, none were raised. Participants said they still lived under the authority of tribal chiefs. For this reason, said the SAG speaker, the Department of Housing had been merged with that of Traditional Affairs in some other provinces.

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